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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 2nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 18 September 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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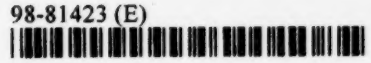

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

1. **The Chairman** said that he would like to begin the meeting on time, but that some of the documents to be considered at the current meeting were not ready. The meeting would be suspended until all the documents became available.

The meeting was suspended at 10 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

Election of the Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur

2. **The Chairman** drew attention to rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and to General Assembly resolution 52/163, by which that rule had been amended to provide for the election of three Vice-Chairmen. He informed the Committee that the Group of African States, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of Western European and Other States, respectively, had nominated Mr. Manlan Ahounou (Côte d'Ivoire), Mrs. Sharon Brennen-Haylock (Bahamas) and Mr. Miles Armitage (Australia) for the posts of Vice-Chairmen. Since there were only three candidates for the three posts, he took it that the Committee wished to dispense with a secret ballot.

3. *It was so decided.*

4. *Mr. Manlan Ahounou (Côte d'Ivoire), Mrs. Sharon Brennen-Haylock (Bahamas) and Mr. Miles Armitage (Australia) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.*

5. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that the Group of Asian States had nominated Mr. Tamman Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) for the post of Rapporteur of the Committee. Since there were no other candidates, he took it that the Committee wished to dispense with a secret ballot.

6. *It was so decided.*

7. *Mr. Tamman Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

Organization of work (A/53/250 and A/53/251; A/C.5/53/1; A/C.5/53/L.1 and A/C.5/53/L.2)

8. **The Chairman** said that the documentation for the current meeting had only just become available and would be distributed shortly. He would officially inform the Under-Secretary-General for Management and the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, on behalf of the Committee, that that practice was unacceptable.

9. He then informed the Committee that the General Assembly had accepted, at its third plenary meeting, all the recommendations of the General Committee concerning the organization of the session (A/53/250). He drew attention to certain of those recommendations: the fifty-third session of the General Assembly should recess not later than Friday, 11 December 1998 and the Fifth Committee should complete its work by Friday, 4 December 1998; as a cost-saving measure, every effort should be made to ensure that meetings of the Main Committees adjourned by 6 p.m., that no meetings were held on weekends and that that cost-saving measure also applied to the remaining meetings on the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1998. The quorum requirement for the opening of meetings of the Main Committees would be waived so that all meetings could begin on time, on the understanding that that would not imply any permanent change in rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and that the quorum requirements for the adoption of decisions would be maintained.

10. With regard to documentation, Member States and the Committee as a whole should exercise restraint in requesting new reports, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/264, paragraph 5, and 51/241, paragraph 32. The Committee should merely take note of those reports of the Secretary-General or subsidiary organs which did not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them, unless specifically requested to do so by the Secretary-General or the organ concerned. On matters related to the programme budget, a mandatory deadline, not later than 1 December, should be established for the submission to the Fifth Committee of all draft resolutions with financial implications, and the Fifth Committee should, as a general practice, consider accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a limit of $25,000 on any one item. Firm deadlines should be set for the submission of reports of subsidiary organs which required consideration by the Fifth Committee. No council, commission or other competent body should take a decision involving either a change in the programme budget approved by the General Assembly or the possible requirement of expenditure unless it had received and taken account of a report from the Secretary-General on the programme budget implications of the proposal. Lastly, he drew the Committee's attention to General Assembly resolution 48/264 and its provisions concerning the possibility of merging certain agenda items and the biennialization and triennialization of certain items.

11. He then informed the Committee that the items referred to it were listed in a letter from the President of the General Assembly addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/53/1); the items were those reflected in document A/53/252. The proposed programme of work (A/C.5/53/L.2) had been prepared by the Fifth Committee secretariat in consultation with all managers involved in the Committee's work and taking due account of relevant General Assembly resolutions and decisions and the availability of documentation. Document A/C.5/53/L.1 concerned the status of preparedness of documentation for the Committee during the main part of the fifty-third session.

12. In view of its heavy workload, it was important for the Committee to make optimum use of the time and conference services allotted to it. To that end, he would request the Secretariat to indicate, prior to the adoption of draft proposals, whether it would be in a position to provide the required documents, in accordance with the six-week rule, and to inform the Committee of all requests for documentation which it could not fulfil on time and from available resources. Lastly, he stressed the need for punctuality and announced his intention to begin all meetings at the designated time. Delegations wishing to speak on a given agenda item should place their names on the list of speakers as early as possible.

13. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that he fully supported the proposed programme of work. In particular, he was pleased to note that it reflected the Committee's decision to set a deadline of 15 October for the completion of its consideration of the support account for peacekeeping operations, and that it provided for the completion of the Committee's work by 4 December. The Committee's experience at the main part of the fifty-second session had demonstrated the need to create a working environment in which its goals could be achieved in a timely and harmonious manner, and the European Union was determined to participate in that effort.

14. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the late submission of documentation, which had repeatedly obliged the Fifth Committee to defer its consideration of important issues, was a major concern and that the six-week rule should be observed. He regretted that the quality of translation of certain documents had not improved, and asked the Secretariat to spare no effort in addressing translation-related questions. In addition, the Secretariat should take into account the need to provide the Committee with interpreters who had expertise in the technical terminology of Fifth Committee issues. Since the meetings of the Group of 77 and China were important for the smooth functioning of the Fifth Committee, he requested the Secretariat to provide interpretation services for those meetings.

15. With respect to the proposed programme of work, the fact that the Fifth Committee would not be adopting a budget at the current session meant that it should devote ample time to issues concerning human resources management and should begin to consider the relevant reports in October, as scheduled in the proposed programme of work (A/C.5/53/L.2). At the main part of the fifty-third session, the Fifth Committee should take decisions on important issues such as the outline of the proposed programme budget for 2000–2001, the programme budget for 1998–1999, programme planning, gratis personnel, the support account for peacekeeping operations, procurement and outsourcing practices, the Development Account, the pattern of conferences, review of the mandate of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the International Trade Centre of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/World Trade Organization (UNCTAD/WTO), the reports of the Board of Auditors and the common system. The Committee should begin to consider the proposed budget outline for 2000–2001 in October, rather than as proposed in document A/C.5/53/L.2, in November.

16. The report of OIOS on the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (A/51/933) and the comments of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/52/575) should be considered along with other thematic reports of OIOS under agenda item 112 on 29 October 1998. Administrative arrangements for the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (A/C.5/52/25 and A/C.5/52/45) should be considered separately under agenda item 112.

17. The mandated review of the functions and reporting procedures of OIOS should be in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/218 B, particularly its paragraph 13, and should be concluded at the main part of the session. Agenda item 145 should therefore be considered in October, rather than November, and more meetings should be devoted to it than envisaged in the proposed programme of work. That review should not be linked to any other oversight bodies. He asked for clarification of the nature of the Secretary-General's reports on amendments to the Staff Rules and on the ability of United Nations officials to carry out their functions as a result of Member States' restrictions. Lastly, the impact of the implementation of pilot projects on budgetary practices and procedures, the revolving credit fund and results-based budgeting, all of which were listed under agenda item 112 in the proposed programme of work, should also be considered under agenda item 30 on United Nations reform.

18. **Mr. Jaremczuk** (Poland) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

19. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that he fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and looked forward to receiving a revised version of the proposed programme of work that took into account the views expressed by the Group.

20. The chronic problem of late documentation had reached alarming proportions. The issuance of reports requested by the legislative bodies was the primary responsibility of the Secretariat, yet some reports which had not been requested by those bodies were issued as a matter of priority. That showed a disregard of Member States' priorities and of General Assembly decisions. It was very important, particularly for small delegations, that documents should be issued in full compliance with the six-week rule. He wondered whether the inordinate delays were caused by the decline in the human and financial resources of substantive departments and of conference services, and asked the Secretariat to provide an explanation. Other issues on which he would like an explanation from the Secretariat were its non-compliance, in a number of cases, with paragraphs 24 and 25 of General Assembly resolution 52/214 B, and the considerable delays in issuing General Assembly resolutions, both in printed form and on the optical disk system.

21. There was a need for better coordination between the secretariats of the Fifth Committee and of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. That would help ensure the timely submission of the Advisory Committee's reports on priority issues such as the budget outline for 2000–2001; the reports of the Secretary-General and of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on that issue were already available.

22. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that he shared the views and concerns expressed in the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

23. **Mr. Kabir** (Bangladesh) said that he, too, associated himself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He hoped that the Bureau would continue, in the future, to ensure flexibility in the Committee's programme of work.

24. **Mr. Watanabe** (Japan) said that he fully supported the Chairman's comments on the need for punctuality and on the status of preparedness of documentation. His delegation had often pointed out that the Committee should be implementing, rather than discussing, improvements in its working methods. Although he had no difficulty in supporting the proposed programme of work at the current stage, he felt that the secretariat should update it to reflect the views expressed by Member States. Flexibility, discipline and balance were undoubtedly important for the Committee's work.

25. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by the representatives of Indonesia, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and Pakistan, particularly with regard to the late issuance of documents, which was, unfortunately, becoming habitual. She asked the secretariat to prepare a revised programme of work reflecting the Group's suggestions. Like the Chairman, her delegation attached great importance to the Committee's discussions and to the deadline for completion of its work. The Committee must display the political will needed to resolve the important issues which it had before it and must take more decisions by consensus in order to correct the bad reputation which it had begun to acquire.

26. **Mr. Medina** (Morocco) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. His delegation attached great importance to completion of the Committee's work by the 4 December deadline and hoped that the Bureau and secretariat of the Committee would do their utmost to implement the recommendations contained in paragraph 12 of document A/53/250.

27. **Ms. Buergo Rodriquez** (Cuba) said that her delegation endorsed the Chairman's remarks regarding the need for punctuality and the timely availability of documentation. She associated herself with the statements made by the representatives of Indonesia, Pakistan and Tunisia regarding the Committee's methods of work. In view of the Committee's heavy workload, it was important that its revised programme of work should provide further information on the topics to be considered under agenda item 113 (programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999). In particular, she wondered which documents the Committee would have before it in considering the report of the Secretary-General on savings achieved by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (A/52/898).

28. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) said that his delegation concurred with the statements made by the Chairman and the representative of Indonesia concerning the need to respect

meeting times and to make optimal use of conference services.

29. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had begun its work on 1 September and had completed its consideration of about 10 reports, some of which pertained to other bodies.

30. The Advisory Committee's report on the support account should be available by the time that the Fifth Committee began its substantive work, as should its comments on the report of the Secretary-General on the Development Account (A/52/1009).

31. With respect to the report of the Secretary-General on savings by UNCTAD (A/52/898), he noted that the Secretary-General's report had been prepared after consultation with the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and Programme Budget of UNCTAD; the Working Party's conclusions were included as an appendix to document A/52/898, and the Advisory Committee's report would be available in due course.

32. The Advisory Committee would soon begin consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the ITC administrative arrangements with WTO (A/C.5/52/45). ACABQ had concluded its discussion of two reports on gratis personnel and planned to devote all of the following week to consideration of the reports of the Board of Auditors. It intended to hold consultations with the Audit Operations Committee and the appropriate representatives of the Secretary-General. The Advisory Committee would also take up the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed budget outline for the biennium 2000–2001 (A/53/220) when the Secretariat was able to provide the most recent exchange and inflation rates.

33. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee), replying to points raised by the representative of Indonesia, noted that in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 51/227 the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to pay special attention to Member States' restrictions which might impede the ability of officials at the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations to carry out their functions, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. He saw no reason why documents A/51/933 and A/52/575 should not be considered on 29 October 1998. Lastly, the reports of the Secretary-General on a Revolving Credit Fund and on a system of results-based budgeting, could also be considered under agenda item 30.

34. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group had taken note of the Secretary's explanations. The Committee should allow ample time for discussion of human resource management and the staff of the United Nations at the fifty-third session. He welcomed the fact that the Committee should be able to consider the reports on a Revolving Credit Fund and on a system of results-based budgeting under item 30 as well as item 112. He hoped that the Bureau would give serious consideration to those points.

35. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that in its resolution 52/235 (paras. 4 and 6), the General Assembly had asked the Secretary-General to submit two reports. While one (A/52/1009) was available, the other (A/53/374), which should have been issued by 31 July and had been scheduled for issuance on 16 September, remained unobtainable. He hoped that the Advisory Committee planned to comment on that document. Lastly, he expressed his delegation's appreciation for the work of the Advisory Committee.

36. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had received an advance copy of the report of the Secretary-General on the utilization of the Development Account (A/53/374) too late to comment on it in conjunction with document A/52/1009. However, if the Fifth Committee wished, ACABQ would prepare a report on the former document.

37. **The Chairman** said that the Committee was, of course, master of its own programme of work and that the Bureau, once elected, would meet to consider a revised programme of work.

38. He asked whether the Committee was prepared to adopt the programme of work, as orally amended, on the understanding that it would be resubmitted in revised form in October 1998.

39. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that it might be better for the Committee to take note of the programme of work on that understanding.

40. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should follow the recommendation made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

41. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.